

**Interview with Blaine Friedlander
conducted by Linda Byrne for the
Providence District History Project Providence Perspective**

July 21, 2010

Linda: Today is July 21st and I am Linda Byrne and I am at the home of Blaine Friedlander for the purposes of an interview for the Providence Perspective History Project. Good morning Blaine.

Blaine: Good morning.

Linda: How are you?

Blaine: Fine and you?

Linda: I am doing well thank you.

Blaine: Great.

Linda: Would you start by telling me a little about yourself- where you grew up and how you came to Fairfax County.

Blaine: I grew up here.

Linda: You grew up here in Fairfax County.

Blain: Pickett Road.

Linda: On Pickett Road.

Blaine: In a white house at the top of the hill.

Linda: Oh that gorgeous one with the columns?

Blaine: Yes.

Linda: Oh, wonderful.

Blaine: That was my childhood home.

Linda: Oh you had a wonderful childhood then in a gorgeous place.

Blaine: Well, yeah.

Linda: How much land was with the house at that time?

Blaine: Well we were on eight acres of a tremendous spot which turned out to be Mantua Hills.

Linda: Oh, my gosh; so did your family own all of that land?

Blaine: No, five acres.

Linda: Five acres.

Blaine: At night you could hear the hunters out chasing raccoons and whatever else was there. During the day we sat and watched Route 50 being built by blowing up the trees along the right of way. My brother and I would sit there and we'd see a tree come flying up and we'd start counting to see how far away it was. We did stuff like that.

Linda: So what years did you live there?

Blaine: 1936 to well it was past 1945 – I was actually in college and my folks decided it was time to sell that house and put the money into education. And they told me they had moved and my father wouldn't let any of my brothers tell me where they had moved.

Linda: And where were you in college?

Blaine: I was in college.

Linda: Where did you go to college?

Blaine: Virginia, so I came home so I had to know where the new house was. And when I got there I got off at a police station where an office building is now in the middle of the city and nobody had ever heard of East Jefferson Street including the cab driver. So a police officer the cabby and I got in the car and ride around

and finally saw one of their cars and knew where I lived. And everybody thought that was really good. They didn't do a good enough job.

Linda: So then your parents were on Jefferson Avenue?

Blaine: No, Jefferson Street.

Linda: Jefferson Street.

Blaine: Right near Columbia Street next to the Columbus Baptist Church.

Linda: Now is that in the City of Fairfax?

Blaine: The City of Falls Church.

Linda: Falls Church. And how long did they live there?

Blaine: My memory is not all that clear – for several years.

Linda: Um hum. So what did you do after college?

Blaine: You know I was 17 years of age and my father thought that since all these returning veterans were going to be competing with me for jobs that I get a soft job just to get on my own. And it worked out rather well. I stayed in school teaching for five years and went into the army in Korea for two years and came back and taught again.

Linda: What did you teach?

Blaine: I taught American History and World History and Spanish and one day the principal came by and told me he needed me to teach math. So I said I can't teach math, I haven't had it since I was in college. He said you have to – either that or I have to throw these kids out of school if you don't take this job. So I – we worked it out so I the first half of the class I left an assignment on the board and when the kids finished they left the paper and they went outside and did whatever high school kids do.

Linda: What school was this?

Blaine: Fairfax High.

Linda: Fairfax High ah.

Blaine: Woodson, the superintendent told me that he had a policy that any graduate from Fairfax County School who wanted a job would be hired if they were qualified; so that he would have a home grown faculty throughout the county. And most of the young male teachers who had graduated with me as young kids after World War II formed a rather unique friendship that's lasted the rest of the years and that's well over 50 years ago.

Linda: That's wonderful.

Blaine: I thought the world of Woodson he's one of the really great people that you meet only nobody knows who he is.

Linda: You went to the University of Virginia did you say?

Blaine: Yes.

Linda: Have things changed a lot since the time you were in college here in Fairfax County?

Blaine: I would say it's not only changed a lot but it's changed dramatically. We were – education was in the process of redefining itself and it was tough on a young single teacher. But I had probably the most fun in my life during that seven year period.

And I would like to tell you about what it was like to come home from Korea to return to high school teaching.

Linda: Yes.

Blaine: Alright, I was – when the draft board told my father that if I went to college right from high school they would let me have one half a year of school since a war was on but at the end of the semester I was going to be drafted. So the war came and here I was thinking I lucked out on that one I missed World War

II I didn't have to go and the war dragged on and on and November they drafted me after the first semester.

Linda: So what year would that have been?

Blaine: 1950 maybe, no 1951.

Linda: 1951.

Blaine: And when I got back I called Walt Dowling one of his faculty members (that's Dowling) one of the faculty members teaching shop and I said I'm back and he says come on to the prom tonight. I said I can't go to the prom I don't have any civilian clothing that will fit me. He said don't wear a civilian suit wear what you got on. And he said did you win any medals? And I said a couple and he said make sure you got them on.

Linda: Oh wonderful, so you wore your uniform with the medals.

Blaine: Yeah, the uniform with the medals and I was wondering why he was insistent.

Linda: What branch of the service were you?

Blaine: I was in the Korean army.

Linda: Oh, that's right you have that unique ah

Blaine: I got my placard would you like to see it?

Linda: After we finish – yes.

Blaine: When I got there it was the shock of my life. Every lady and girl who was at that party lined up and I had a reception line. It never happened after that but it was really quite an experience.

Linda: Oh, I bet. Now you were drafted into the U.S. Army.

Blaine: Army

Linda: And then when you arrived in Korea you were transferred into the Korean Army – explain why and how they did that.

Blaine: Well if you read the papers today you will see that they are doing the same thing. There were 40 American soldiers attached to each Korean Division. We were treated as if we were company grade officers. Most of us were privates, private first class; and most of us had college experience and all of us could speak a second language – mine was Spanish which I will tell you about in a minute. But there I was a Spanish teacher in the Korean Army and I was assigned five Korean enlisted men to work with me in teaching the Koreans how to be a part of the army. And it worked the Korean soldiers were just exemplary in their conduct toward us. In fact the day that I arrived as a private in the army I'm walking into the mess tent at the direction of the chief cook and this Korean comes out and I notice the star on his hat and I wondered what I was going to do because I had my hands in my pocket. And he comes over and offers his hand and says that he's general Oh the general of my division. So we had a very pleasant introductory conversation. It turned out that he was a survivor of Hiroshima; he was in Hiroshima the day the bomb was dropped.

Linda: My goodness.

Blaine: And he happened to walk into the train which was a brick building just as the bomb fell. And he had a tremendous amount of respect for the Americans he was a Second Lieutenant in the Japanese Army; and after the war they made him a General in the Korean Army cause he know how to run things. And I know it never happens in the American Army but he was so tickled with Americans that he would stop you from whatever you were doing just to chat with you.

Linda: Oh.

Blaine: And the – I had in my group of five, two interpreters and just either before or after Christmas 1961 I was asked if I would help teach English to the Koreans while we were pulled off line and were in a rest camp. And they would understand it if I would rather not – they would seek out someone else to teach them English but they would appreciate it if I would be a part of this group of

eight Korean officers teaching 25 or 30 Koreans. And that was an experience because I was the final exam. In order to pass the course they had to talk to me for 15 minutes in English.

Linda: Oh my goodness.

Blaine: I had to understand what they were talking about.

Linda: Uh huh.

Blaine: And it went over fairly well. One of the things we did was use a – the only text book we had – we were five miles behind the front lines and the only test book we had was a Japanese text book.

Linda: Ah.

Blaine: And we were having a struggle to use that. Finally we got to a word called ambulance. I couldn't explain to any Korean either in the class or watching the class that took the class what an ambulance was in Korean. So finally someone came and said is it a hospital wagon and we all agreed that this was a hospital wagon. So in that moment every Korean soldier had an opportunity to understand if he was put into a hospital wagon it was an ambulance. It's just little stuff like that.

Linda: How long were you in Korea?

Blaine: Nine months.

Linda: Ah huh, and then when you came back here.

Blaine: I went to

Linda: Back to school?

Blaine: The day I went, the day after I went into the army I was – I mean the day I got out of the army I was teaching Spanish no matter where I went.

Linda: Um hum.

Blaine: But I just thought that was hilarious. And that was my army experience – I enjoyed it believe it or not.

Linda: You did?

Blaine: Yeah, I was on the front line most of the time.

Linda: Was that the 32nd parallel?

Blaine: I was 50 miles north of the 32nd parallel. My Unit was 50 miles into North Korea.

Linda: Um hum.

Blaine: And the opportunity of being with different people was fabulous.

Linda: Oh that's wonderful. Now let's jump ahead.

Blaine: Alright.

Linda: You came back and you went back to school and eventually you married – tell me how you met your wife.

Blaine: This is my version.

Linda: Okay.

Blaine: It may not be altogether accurate. I was invited to a wedding and in the wedding was Amelia Reliant who was also a member of the wedding was a close mutual friend of ours who was getting married at a hotel in Washington and Buddy Rothschild was one place and Ray Gallant and I were posted behind the potted plant for some reason and I can't remember. And Ray was telling me as I put it that his eligibly ugly sister in law he wanted to find somebody to take her take her off his hands. So I said well I'll try her out and if I like her I'll keep her. This was the conversation. That was Sunday – the next Sunday Phyllis and I met for the first time and six months later we were married.

Linda: Oh that's wonderful.

Blaine: Yeah, it turned out to be – she was a lot nicer than I thought she was – since she was the artist that was painting these

Linda: You have lovely – yes – are they oils, acrylic?

Blaine: Yeah, she really got mad at me when all this stuff from her home in Pennsylvania showed up here. And I said to her I didn't know you painted and she exploded, she said what did you think I was doing. That's my version of the story.

Linda: How long have you been married?

Blaine: 50 years.

Linda: 50 years ah – and children?

Blaine: I have two – you've probably heard of my oldest son Blaine Friedlander Jr.

Linda: I have.

Blaine: The Washington Post.

Linda: Tell me a little about him.

Blaine: Well he's very proud of his job in fact he – the first and only job he had was working for the Washington Post he later started writing a column called Sky Watch. I don't know if you've ever heard of it or not it's about astronomy.

Linda: um hum.

Blaine: Where the stars are and that sort of thing and he was well known for that when he was offered a job as the public relations man at Radford. He took that for a couple of years and became a member of the faculty at um Radford.

Linda: Radford College yes.

Blaine: And from there transferred that into a job with Cornell University where he is assistant to the President of the University and has charge of all of the public

relations. And every once in a while he'll call me and say now you have to watch your son on television because this is what I'm doing.

Linda: Well as you are talking – yesterday I googled Blaine Friedlander and got a wonderful interview that he was doing with someone – he does interviews for them sometimes?

Blaine: All the time.

Linda: All the time.

Blaine: He was hosting Nancy Pelosi in the last election.

Linda: Yes.

Blaine: And the funniest one of all – he had two boys, he is divorced from his wife and that was a terrible episode for anyone to live through and me I lived through it too. But he was hosting (what was it) he used to be the Governor of Vermont?

Linda: Oh, Howard Dean.

Blaine: Howard Dean – and he took his boys into another room next to where Howard was making a speech to students at Cornell and Beep (his nickname is Beep and the reason his nickname is Beep is because that that was my college nickname. And when we were married and Beep was born and one day Rose was hollering at Beep because he was moving around when she was trying to change the diaper and she fussed at him and said “Be quiet Beep”. I didn't know what was going on so I got up and there was young Beep being very obnoxious.

Linda: Um hum. What schools did your son go to here in Fairfax County?

Blaine: George Marshall.

Linda: George Marshall.

Blaine: And Shrevewood Elementary.

Linda: um hum.

Blaine: And Longfellow Intermediate.

Linda: What do you think about the education system here in Fairfax County?

Blaine: I like it. I think it is one of the finest. Well one day Phyllis tells me that I'm going to be the president of the P.T.A. and I said why? – Because I told them you would take it. So I became President of the P.T.A. But I told the principal of the school who I knew as a teacher – she taught at Oakton Elementary School – I said if you want me to be a member of the P.T.A. I said don't make me have meetings in the school because there was a little bar just across the street from the school – so where we could have a beer while we were talking about these things. She thought it was a great idea. And at the first meeting we had, the police raided the place.

Linda: Oh no!

Blaine: Why I don't know, (laughing) there were several of us leading citizens with the Principal sitting drinking beer. We got out of there as fast as we could and never went back.

Linda: How long have you lived in this house?

Blaine: Since Columbus Day 1952.

Linda: So you've seen a lot of building go on around you here – roughly at Route 7 and Idlewood.

Blaine: I was involved in a lot of it.

Linda: Were you?

Blaine: Do you know Joe Alexander?

Linda: No, I don't.

Blaine: He was a county supervisor from I guess it – what's the district that

Linda: Providence District?

Blaine: No not Providence, the district down next to Mount Vernon.

Linda: Lee, there's Springfield.

Blaine: Lee District, it was Lee District. And I was just thinking about that the other day for some strange reason. There's a building near Bailey's Cross Roads that the Army has taken over and this is where the action took place. Somebody changed the zoning without any authority or permission or any legal right.

Linda: Oh my goodness.

Blaine: And the lady who owned it was in her seventies and she was furious. They changed the zoning from residential to high commercial. And the first thing we did when I appeared as this lady's representative before the Board of Supervisors was to get in a fight with Joe Alexander and a couple other of the members who couldn't understand as a zoning attorney why I was trying to overturn the most coveted of zoning. And you know what I'm talking about.

Linda: Yes, yes.

Blaine: And it was a donnybrook.

Linda: Well hold that thought and let's jump back. You went back to school to become an attorney and you were a land use attorney. Tell me about that time period.

Blaine: I wasn't a land use attorney, I was a criminal attorney.

Linda: Oh, my goodness. So where did you go to law school?

Blaine: Georgetown; I also have a degree from G.W. in teaching a Master of Education.

Linda: Wow.

Blaine: And I've been taking course here and there at George Mason University. That's all been a part of my life that seems so normal that I don't think of it right off the bat.

Linda: Ah huh. So did you get your law degree while you were married or before you got married?

Blaine: Both.

Linda: Both – before and during and then please go back to your story of the lady who didn't want the commercial zoning of her property.

Blaine: It seems that everybody including the members of the Board of Supervisors wanted that piece of property zoned to favor – There were two lawyers who controlled the zoning in Fairfax County and I'm serious about that. You wanted something passed you hired one of those two lawyers.

Linda: Who were they do you remember?

Blaine: I can't remember their names right now. They tried to approach that one on a different angle in this case. Here I am arguing to reverse their zoning. And they Joe Alexander and the other two guys – Stanley Parrish was one – and it wasn't like we were enemies we were all good friends. And you had a zoning case you talked to them – out of the presence or in the presence whoever you wanted. And Joe was pleading with me not to do this. And I am pleading with them if they don't do it I'm going to take it to the Bar Association and get them convicted of something - and it wasn't pleasant.

Finally they agreed that they hadn't – since it was illegally edited - it didn't really make much difference what they did – I was going to win the case eventually and probably cost all of them their jobs. So my client was tickled to death – died very shortly thereafter. It was in six months the land was rezoned.

Linda: Oh, my goodness – and what's on that land today?

Blaine: A big office building. I mean I didn't have any problems with it – I agreed with them I thought they were right but the lady paid me money to see that she won the case; so I did. Going back - Stan Parrish was one of the ones at my Korean war party at the Shoreham hotel. And Stan Parrish came over, and he was in his cups as they say, and he insisted on having his picture taken with me he was

tell me and several of the Congressman and so on – how important a lawyer I was and really a lot of fun like that has happened.

Linda: Ah huh, that's great. How long have you been retired?

Blaine: I don't think I've ever been retired.

Linda: You haven't you still keep your hand in.

Blaine: In a different way.

Linda: Tell me a little about the VFW. I know that is one of your volunteer passions.

Blaine: I am the past District Commander and I'm probably the only one in the VFW that has ever looked for the job. I really didn't want it.

Linda: I should say Veterans of Foreign Wars the VFW.

Blaine: Yes and our Post has now got 300 people in it.

Linda: And which one is that?

Blaine: That's the one in Fairfax City.

Linda: In Fairfax City.

Blaine: Actually it's in Fairfax Station. That was an interesting battle as well; and one of the things that I did was help establish the parade – the 4th of July parade. And after 20 years of doing that, it was tiring so I retired from the VFW.

Linda: I love that parade, I have, in fact one year I was marching in that parade for a political candidate and someone's horse got lose and the horse came galloping down the street and I was able to grab the bridle and stop the horse. And everyone applauded and it was a beautiful little grey Arab – white grey. And it reared up and came back down – it was gorgeous and someone got a picture of me with this horse.

Blaine: That happened in front of the viewing stand.

Linda: Did it?

Blaine: I don't know – I was asking you.

Linda: Oh, no it was around the corner. Someone was saddling the horse up and they had the bridle on with the reins over the neck.

Blaine: Before the parade?

Linda: Yes and the horse had gotten lose. But we were standing there with a political sign and I said to someone "oh, I'll be right back" as I saw the horse coming up and run by us so I was able to grab it. So I love that parade.

Now tell me about the traffic that you have seen changes in traffic in your years here in Fairfax County.

Blaine: Just about what it was in 1945 during the war and no cars were on the road at all.

Linda: Really.

Blaine: In fact my grandfather died and somehow or other I convinced my mother and one of my aunts that I ought to be allowed to drive to the funeral in Washington, D.C. I had never driven before in Washington, D.C., I had just gotten my license just two or three weeks before. And here I am doing 25 miles an hour on Arlington Boulevard from Fairfax Circle to Washington. And believe it or not I turned around to my mother and said can I go over 25 miles an hour there are no cars on the road? And she said absolutely not. So that was our position and I stayed within the speed limit -

Linda: Chuckling.

Blaine: Which was 25 miles per hour on Arlington Boulevard with no traffic.

Linda: Oh my gosh.

Blaine: When they build Arlington Boulevard my brother and I were about 10 years old and I mean I was telling you we actually saw that tree come flying out of there in the road.

And Dad one day was driving from Falls Church to Washington and went off on the dirt road that was then Arlington Boulevard and he said I wonder what I can do on this and he went a hundred miles an hour from Fairfax Circle to Washington, D.C. No cops, no cars, nothing.

Linda: Oh, my goodness. No traffic lights probably.

Blaine: There wasn't any traffic.

Linda: Uh huh.

Blaine: That explains my view of what was happening but everybody was doing it. Everybody was having a great time.

I was on the Fairfax High School football team. I weighed a little over a hundred pounds so I was a backfield running back. And if you weighed over 125 pounds you were a lineman. We were a lot smaller in those days then we are now.

And we were allowed to do things that we wouldn't be allowed to do today as far as causing some sad moments. And this time when I was a sophomore my seat mate at that time was getting ready to join the army – we were sophomores.

Linda: This is in high school?

Blaine: This is in high school – we only had 11 years of school, there was no 12th grade.

Linda: Ah huh.

Blaine: No there wasn't any 12th grade. Since there wasn't any 12 grade it saves them money they didn't have to have any 12th grade teachers.

He was telling me how it went and we shook hands and said goodbye and I never saw him again.

Linda: Oh.

Blaine: Till I heard he'd been killed on D Day.

Linda: Oh how awful.

Blaine: And his father became and alcoholic. His father was one of the respected leaders of Fairfax. There was a sad time when it should have been a time of great joy to win a battle. I really need to review that in my mind the order that I have done.

But the way we were more together as people back then not like we are now. And citizen participation despite the fact that was at a peak at all times; if there was a school social everybody went; if there was a play everybody went, something that you don't see now.

Linda: Yes, um if you were going to give advice to someone who is moving to Fairfax County what would you say?

Blaine: I could be factious and tell them not to come. There's too many cars.

Linda: Too many cars laughing.

Blaine: That's my spontaneous answer.

Linda: Ah huh.

Blaine: And Phyllis and I were discussing not that point but since we have two sons one of which just graduated from high school and was going to college and the younger son who was chosen by the faculty to the president of the senior class (junior class this year) he'll be going to college next year; and the main problem our family has is how are we going to, you know, get this money together.

When I went to college it cost \$125.00 for a room, board and books.

Linda: Wow.

Blaine: I don't see how these kids do it.

Linda: Yeah nowadays it's quite expensive.

Blaine: Then I would address the traffic problem.

Linda: Do you think the new metro that they are going to bring through Tysons Corner is going to help the traffic situation?

Blaine: Do you want a really honest answer?

Linda: Of course.

Blaine: Absolutely not.

Linda: Why is that?

Blaine: I don't want to personal blame on any person but this was a thought that occurred to me yesterday – we do not select the best people to run for office although I voted for Ms. Smyth every time she's run. I have no problems with her.

Linda: Right – she's the only Board of Supervisor member who has been on the land use and has a background in that. But it's awfully difficult when you have one person that knows what should be done to convince everybody else the right path.

Blaine: Well that was one of the things I was going to ask you – how do I get involved.

Linda: How do you get involved?

Blaine: Yeah.

Linda: We'll have to ask Supervisor Smyth how you can get involved.

Blaine: I actually did this yesterday – on channel 70 some MSNBC – I had no idea what it was and I was listening to somebody – some arrogant person raising cane with one of his guests and I don't like that format where guests sit there and they try to trick them with several questions and get a good fight started and then call it off - So that you don't learn anything and I got up in disgust and left and Phyllis said oh I enjoy it. So I went somewhere else. I blame the press -

Linda: The press?

Blaine: for what's happening because nobody knows what's happening. I still don't know what that press stuff that they have and one of these days in fact I might even write a letter to Linda. (Supervisor Linda Smyth) I am going to write a letter suggesting that instead of all the foolishness we have if we spent time teaching the people what is needed – what these issues are about. Now I was definitely dealing with that – it's like when I was teaching school the VFW – one story about that – Do you know a police officer by the name of Scott Boatwright?

Linda: No I don't.

Blaine: Probably one of the better police officers they've ever had. He's a member of our Post and a Vietnam veteran. Now the problem was that Scott and I and the members of our Post wanted to build a Post Home. We actually raised the money and had all the money over 300,000 dollars in one spot. Then the lawyer for the citizens that were interested in this was there in opposition – he was a good friend with members of our Post and we were sitting there trying to figure how to enjoy ourselves while we were acting important for the Fairfax City Council and one thing led to another and we got off the subject and we were discussing what kind of zoning we needed.

Linda: And this would be for a VFW Post home where it would house veterans?

Blaine: No it would be a place like the one down here in Falls Church. Our place is different from the one in Falls Church we don't allow the drinking at all.

Linda: Uh huh.

Blaine: They did, they don't now and they are only a block away but I very seldom go over there.

Linda: What kind of activities do you have at a Post?

Blaine: Any kind that suits the fancy of the particular people.

Linda: So you have social gatherings as well as educational?

Blaine: Well they call it educational but it really isn't. But you have in each Post a small group of people that run it. And I became the district commander because I couldn't find anybody to stop the drinking at a couple of our Posts.

Linda: And you were able to do that?

Blaine: I stopped the drinking to a large extent. And I had a little problem with the fact that some of the Posts members wives were running around with some of the Posts members.

Linda: Oh dear.

Blaine: This is not Fairfax but it was a different Post.

Linda: Oh.

Blaine: Those things are happening and I after a year I was asked if I would get in line to become the Post Commander and District Commander and the State Commander eventually. And I thought to myself while a silly thing to do here I am with two kids in elementary school who need me at home and I would be spending all my time visiting Posts with folks listening to a lot of nonsense and well trained line.

Linda: So you didn't take that position.

Blaine: No – I stopped.

Linda: You stopped. Well this interview has been very interesting. You've led an interesting very interesting life is there anything else that you want to share?

Blaine: Oh my I thought you might like to see the citation – I was told I was the first enlisted man in the American Army to make it - 52 – to receive such a citation.

Linda: Oh wonderful – yes let's look at your citation.